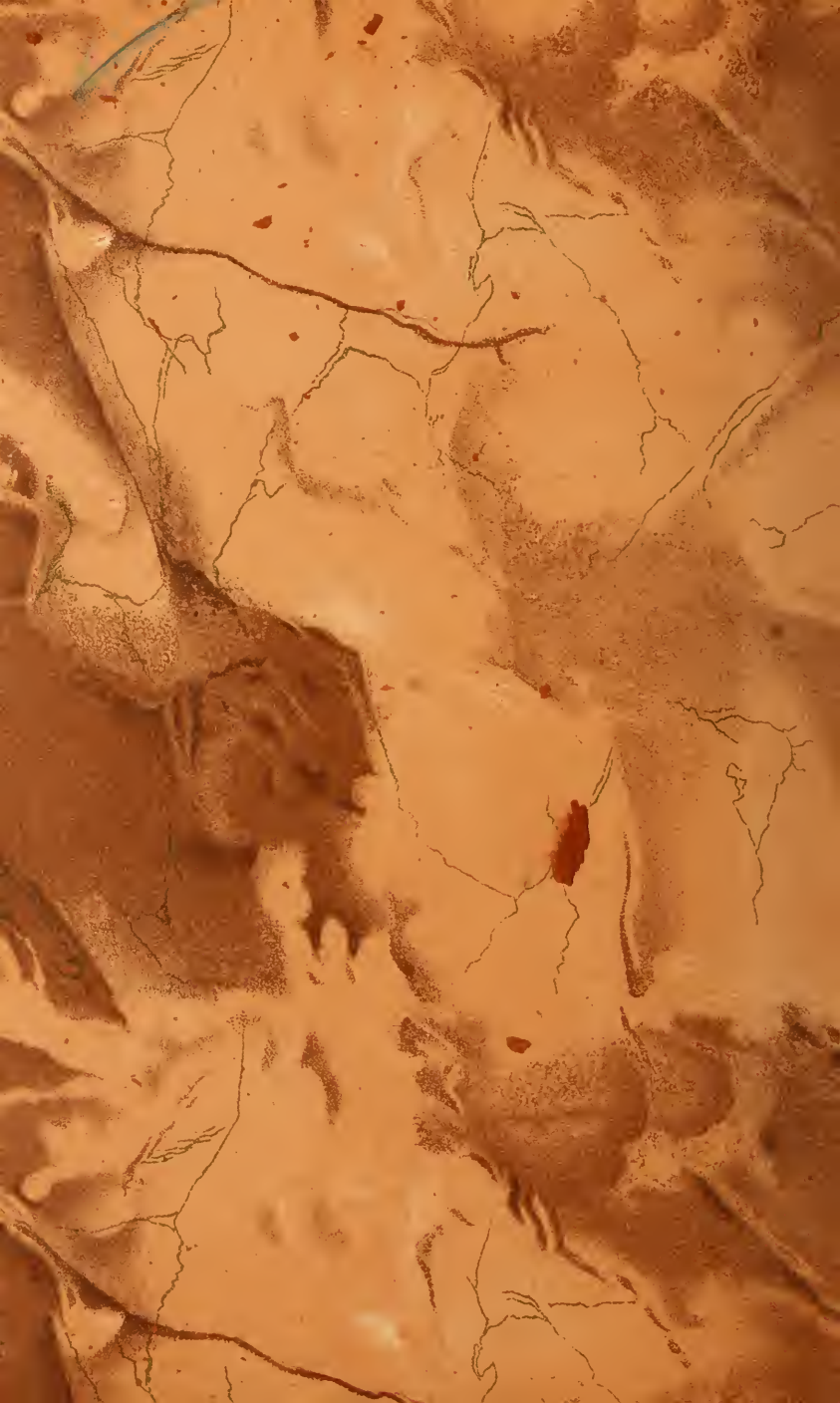
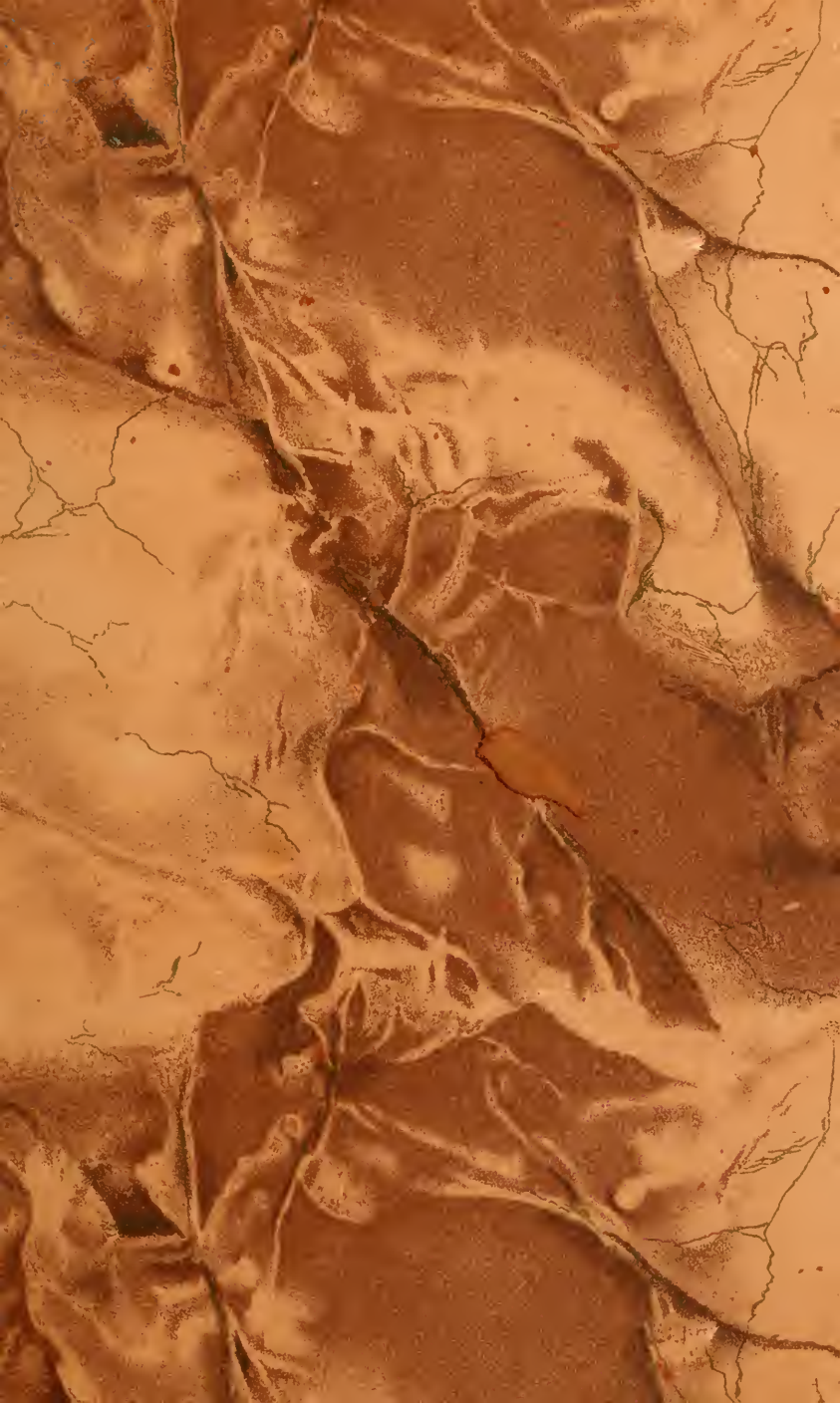


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Harpstring and Bowstring





Harpstring and Bowstring

Ethel Wahl Harmon



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To the Critic

Oh! stern relentless critic,
Whomever you may be;
I trust you'll not be too severe,
Nor judge me hastily.

I'm not so very learned,
I speak in but one tongue,
I've yet to win my laurels,
And my praises are still unsung.

So when you read these lines,
Remember this I pray;
Renown is not gained in an hour,
Nor Fame within a day!

To a Baby

A little bundle, pink and white,
So fair, and sweet ;
Ten fingers that are never still,
Two restless feet !

Blue eyes where mischief lies concealed,
A chubby nose ;
A tiny mouth pursed—for a kiss
Do you suppose ?

A tuft of down upon its head,
A winsome smile ;
And dimples soft, just simply made
To willfully beguile.

Wee cause of all the pain, and joy
And fear—
Yet all the world's wealth couldn't buy you,
Baby dear !

Harpstring and Bowstring

Mother

Mother! ah, could there be a name more dear,
Pronounced by awkward tongue to charm the ear,

And soothe unrest?

Its simple tone speaks volumes in one word,
To me of all the names I've ever heard,

That one is best.

It speaks of goodness, and of gentle deeds,
Of kindly acts to fit another's needs,

In sorest grief;

It stands for her to whom may always go,
One who knows deepest joy or keenest woe,

And find relief.

The embodiment of every simple truth,
Linked with all tenderness, and love for youth,

And, oh! my fear!

When e'er I think of her, it seems to me,
That were she gone, I, too, would cease to be,

Without her near!

The Spirit of Christmas

Now is the season come again,
 With song and love and laughter rife;
When the veriest joy fills the hearts of men,
 And bids them put an end to strife.

For this is a time of peace, you know,
 When life consists but of loving and giving;
When the sting of the frost, and the sight of the
 snow,
 Give an added zest to living.

Without, the wind chills; within it is warm;
 And what care we for the shrieking gale?
'Tis Christmas eve, we are safe from the storm,
 That in fury sweeps o'er the whitening vale.

Come, let us gather about the fire,
 Away with care! Let joy abound!
Is there more that anyone could desire,
 Or a jollier season than this to be found?

A Haunting Thought

How terrible to think, when love grows cold,
Hands must lie listless in the other's hold;
And eyes meet eyes in vague uneasiness,
And lips give dully the once wild caress;
Footsteps are laggard near the threshold door,
And hesitate, which else had flown before;
No quickened heart beat—no responsive touch,
That in the olden days had meant so much!

Oh! can it be that for these life holds aught,
Of happiness they once so madly sought;
For them must not the wind wail in the trees,
In lieu of erstwhile sweetest melodies?
The golden sunbeams turn to burning brass,
And shrivel at a breath the tender grass;
The flower's bright colors,—daubs upon the earth,
The bird's songs caustic in their mocking mirth?
So must love's eyes, distorted, seem to see,
A discord throughout nature's harmony!

Harpstring and Bowstring

If ever on my life this blight should fall,
And no response come to my eager call ;
And soothe with gentle voice, and sweet caress—
No answering hand mine own to warmly press ;
To look into blank eyes, and know that there
Lay reason, whole and entire, for despair—
I'd hold my life quite worthless, finished—done,
And pray to God for blest oblivion !

Autumn

The chill of autumn days hangs in the air,
I scent the dying leaves in swift dismay;
And sit and grieve to think that everywhere,
Fair summer's fast submitting to decay.

She came so burdened with her wondrous gold,
The wealth of foliage that the spring had left;
But now her throbbing pulse has grown cold,
Of every charm she had, she is bereft.

I reason well, and then no more lament,
The autumn yielded to no lesser place—
But urged complete fruition, gladly lent,
A deeper beauty to a lovely face!

In My Garden

Once, at the close of day, when the still hush,
Lay over all, between sunset and night;
I sought my garden, where a thousand flowers,
Were all arrayed in lovely robes so bright.

And was it my fond fancy when I thought,
I heard a lily pleading with a rose;
For some return for all the love he gave,
And saw her color deep? Do you suppose

Imagination lured me on and on,
When I beheld a timid pansy's face—
Pressed close against a stalwart hollyhock's,
And seemed to rather like his bold embrace?

I wonder if I dreamed, or really saw,
The shy forget-me-not in witching dress,
Upturn her little lips and quite repay,
The purple violet's passionate caress?

And rapt in envy of their love, I felt,
A presence, and two strong arms round me steal;
Poor flowers, I know now 'twas *they* who envied *me*,
The love a *human heart*, alone, can feel!

My Ship of Life

The sky is the blue of the ocean upturned,
All silent and deep and vast ;
And the sun rides, a beautiful ship of gold,
And each beam is a glistening mast.

The fleecy clouds are the surging waves,
That dash 'gainst its sides in vain ;
Like breakers rebuffed by a bulwark strong,
They advance and retreat again.

And the brilliant stars that come out at night,
Are the pilot lights of the sea ;
That are set to warn the wayward ships,
Of the meteors trailing free.

I am told they are trimmed by angel hands,
And that when the night grows grey ;
Are blown out by the touch of their breath,
And silently carried away.

At dawn from her port in the gilded east,
The sun plows, freighted with heat and light ;
To travel the whole of the ocean wide,
Ere the day be turned into night.

Harpstring and Bowstring

Full bravely she battles the clouds of foam,
To regain her port in the west;
Unerring, true, she sails her course,
To the region of twilight and rest.

Oh! well I know that her ship is fair,
But mine is more beautiful, still, to me;
My "Ship of Life," weathering stoutest gales,
And bound for her harbor, just back of the Sea!

To My Father

Oh, Father dear, I wonder if you guess,
The wealth of love I bear, the tenderness;
The gratitude that floods my being thru—
The yearning for all great things—just for you!

I long to show, somehow, in some big way,
My eagerness my debt to quite repay,
But even at the end I still would owe,
For all the love and care that you bestow.

I cannot bear to think that your good name,
So dear to me, may never know the fame,
That keeps all great and good men's memories green,
Long after death has come to intervene.

And so this humble little verse I write,
In hope that to your memory, my small mite,
Of tribute and of praise, shall added be—
To last for all time, thru Eternity!

March

Wild month of ice, and sleet, and wintry snow,
When skies are dullest grey, when chill winds blow,
Thou laggard month of March art here at last,
Accompanied by the roaring of the blast;
The north wind loudly shrieks, the white snow flies,
Devoid of brightness are the leaden skies;
The fettered rivers fast in ice are bound,
And chafe and fret their banks with grating sound.
Imprisoned streams! they struggle to be free,
To flow once more to gain the welcoming sea!

Dissembling month! we know thy subtle guile,
Thy wintry frown conceals a sunny smile;
The cheerless heavens serve but for disguise,
They keep in store for us a glad surprise—
Of deepest blue that comes soon after March—
Quick-treading in her wake, when elm and larch,
And oak, and pine, and ash, grow young again,
And drape their supple limbs where once had been
Dress of less tender hue! Ah, they appear,
More beautiful with each succeeding year—
To eyes in love of Nature's hold, well skilled,
And they who come protesting loud, are stilled—
In sight of Nature's charms, and boundless powers,
Expressed in grandest trees, in smallest flowers!

The Little Cripple

Sometimes, when the great world's fast asleep,
And everything is still;
I creep from bed to go and lean,
Upon my window sill.

That's when the ache is hurtin' most,
And the stars with their glistenin' eyes—
Look down so friendly like, as tho,
They wanted to sympathize.

And even the big, white moon looks sad,
When I grit my teeth with the pain
That starts a runnin' down my back,
And then crawls up again!

I close my eyes, and say a prayer,
And hold my breath until—
It 'most seems, God, Himself, pities me,
When I lean on my window sill.

Harpstring and Bowstring

Hope*

She sits upon a silent world,
Her figure bowed, within her arm,
Her poor harp clutched against her breast,
To save the one last string from harm!

Her eyes are blinded from the truth,
And bound so that she may not see;
But what a wondrous sound to hear
The music of her melody!

Played by the one string on her harp,
Thru endless years that give no sign—
Her mind racked by a thousand fears,
But in her heart, the spark divine!

*This poem was written after seeing George Frederick Watts' painting entitled "Hope."

The Lonely Pool

Down near the meadow, and past the mill,
I know where stands a lonely pool;
All lined with pines, just back of the hill,
Where the shadows are green and cool.

Often I go to the place I love best,
By the sights, and the sounds of the woodland led;
Where soft grass on its banks seems to whisper of rest,
With God's blue, blue sky overhead.

And thru the broad trees wide-spreading green,
The patches of yellow sunlight show;
While the flowers reflect their brilliant sheen,
As with crimson and gold they glow.

Sometimes, when in pensive mood, dreaming there,
In the water's clear depths I can fancy the charm,
Of the long waving locks of a mermaid's hair,
And the gleam of her slender-white arm.

Harpstring and Bowstring

Tho in saner moments, I know it to be,
But a transient delight of a moment's loan;
'Tis only the sweep of soft moss that I see,
And the shimmering glint of smooth stone.

With silence and solitude there, I rule,
And pity those souls of pain and distress,
Who, most of them, know no lonely pool,
Where is calm, and peace, and forgetfulness!

A Message

Across the lonely miles between,
Over the summer's waving green,
I've sent a message speeding—
And oh! my heart is troubled lest,
It find a lodging in a breast
Cold and unheeding!

Alas! it may have taken flight,
At so much beauty within sight,
Around—above you;
And crept back to my heart, and so
My dear one, you may never know,
How much I love you!

Weariness

How long the hours of the laggard day,

To one in pain!

Oh! could the time of quiet and of calm

But come again!

How weary are the endless years,

That hold no peace!

How distant seems the far off goal

That brings release!

How dark is life to all those that despair

Each soul distressed!

But know thou, some day, that to each will come

His time of rest?

The Siren

I have heard of a Siren, who all day long,
Sits 'mong the rocks of a wild desert isle;
And thru the slow hours she sings a weird song,
And combs her gold tresses the while.

The face of the Siren, ah! tis so fair,
As white as marble, and cold as death;
Enraged, the ice-winds must have come from their lair,
And chiseled it so with their breath.

Were her lips but dumb, her eyes needs must speak,
A fiend's eyes surely, of darkest hue;
Twin flames of green that were made to seek,
For the devil who's looking thru.

Her ivory teeth are cruelly white,
And her soft curved lips are a deep blood red;
Her long yellow hair is by far too bright,
That streams from her beautiful head.

Harpstring and Bowstring

She cares not the tears, and she recks not the pain,
 (Ah! her smile is so painfully sweet);
Her heart of stone counts not the loss or the gain,
 Save in souls of the passing fleet.

Oh! beware of the Siren who sits on the rocks,
 And steer your ship clear of her isle;
For she's waiting and combing her lovely gold locks,
 And 'tis there that she sings all the while!

Harpstring and Bowstring

Because

I wonder why the brightest stars,
Are less bright than your eyes;
Two matchless orbs are they, that have
No rivals in the skies.

I wish I knew just why your hair,
Is fairer than the sun's fair beams,
Spun gold, like fairy princesses',
One sees, sometimes, in dreams.

I've asked myself so often why,
Your blushes swift are far more sweet,
Than all the radiance of the sky,
When dawn and daylight meet.

I've wondered why, so many times,
Your red lips seem to shame the rose;
And why your velvet throat has more
Of softness than a snowdrift knows.

I'm wondering if all's so because,
I'm happiest when you are near;
I'm wondering if it is not just—
Because I love you, dear!

A Friend

I have a friend—a friend I hold most dear,
And when I am alone she comes to me;
And `sitting near me in her quiet way,
She proves the most delightful company.

She has the gentlest manner in the world,
Her voice so low I needs must bend to hear;
My worried brow grows smooth beneath her touch,
My fevered pulse is calmed when she is near.

She prompts me on to bigger, better things—
She wakes my sluggard conscience at command;
And inspiration to more worthy aims is mine,
If she but speak, or take me by the hand.

My cares drop from me like so many chains,
When we're alone, where none else can intrude
Save peace and rest here in the twilight dim;
I love her well; her name is "Solitude."

Harpstring and Bowstring

Loss

I planted in my heart a little seed,
And thought to tend it well with gentle care ;
To guard it from all harm the while it grew,
And guessed the lovely flowers it would bear.

Its tiny stems, at first, were weak and frail,
But still I gave it all the love I knew ;
And it my watchfulness repaid, until,
Into a strong and hardy plant it grew.

The world called to me, and with eager feet,
I hurried out to play, forgetting quite,
That young leaves need the sunshine and the air,
But cannot live in chill winds of the night.

(And giddy was the dance at every turn,
And joyously I played my little part ;
Long days I stayed, until gross surfeit came,
But left me in repentance, sick at heart!)

Harpstring and Bowstring

At last, full weary, I returned again,
Remembered it, and all its many needs;
Contrite in my sorrow, but alas,
I found my poor plant quite choked out with weeds.

I pulled them up, and with redoubled care,
I waited long, and watched, but all in vain;
Not all my tears could bring it back to life,
Nor all my heartache make it green again!

Questions

Can one person measure another's woe,
 Who has not sounded the depths of hell?
Can the pain of a slave be understood,
 Till the body is bought, and the soul as well?

Can grief and despair be gauged at will,
 By one who has never known care?
Can faintest pin-pricks on the skin,
 With the red welts on the soul compare?

Can one feel the deep fierce joy of life—
 Or know of happiness the price,—
Of ecstasy, and wildest bliss,
 Who has not tasted paradise?

Love's Coming

Oh, Gold, with your yellow glitter,
Thou hast no wealth to tempt me now;
Thy living snares have made me bitter,
And Love is the idol 'fore which I bow.
Oh, Love, before thy coming,
Life was indeed a dreary waste,
But now it is too full for summing,
Love with my life is encased!

My Lady

Your dear eyes smile right into mine,
Your lips are trembling on a word,
I listen for your answer, sweet,
An answer longed for—never heard!
Your fair hair fans my cheek, I vow,
I fancy I most hear you laugh—
In mocking glee, because I look
For answer from a photograph!

The Dawn

The white clouds scudded low across the sky,
Like huge-winged snowy birds fast flying by;
And pale, dim stars within their rifts were set,
Caught in the meshes of their gauzy net.
The sad sea's waters were all churned and rough,
And beat upon their confines in rebuff,
With hissing swish, and loud tumultuous roar,
The racing breakers dashed upon the shore,
And over all, there hung a vague unrest,
The wood bird twittered feebly in his nest;
The giddy winds their wanton play increased,
Whirling around and 'round in mad caprice!

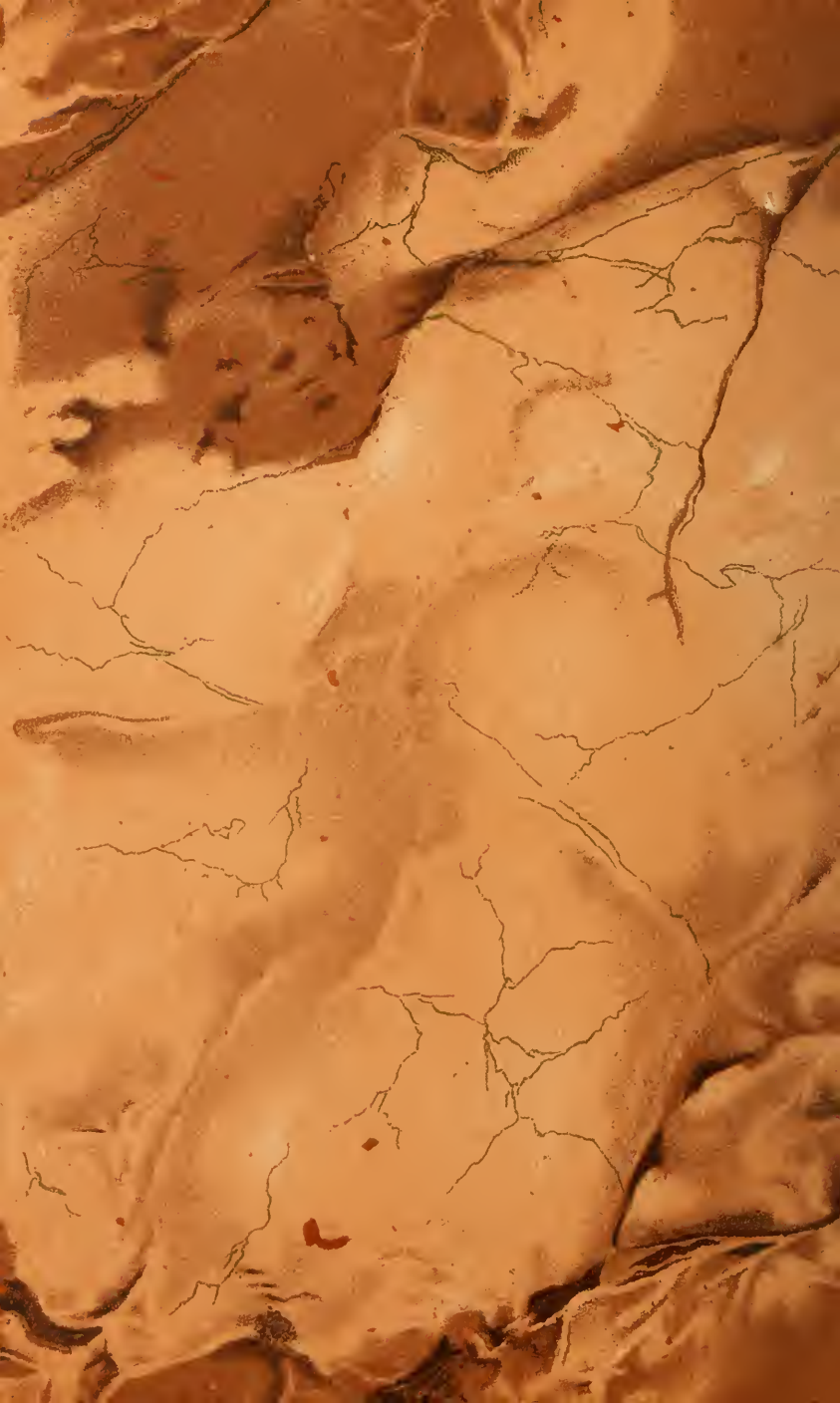
The black-garbed "Night" looked o'er the mountain's
edge,
And held with shadowy hands its upmost ledge;
He gazed far downward in the depths where lay,
That lovely thing of light which we call, "Day."
And gazed transfixed, for far below he saw,
A picture that no artist e'er could draw,
The sleeping "Day" all bathed in golden light,
And sunbeams playing in her hair so bright.
The "Night," enraptured with her subtle grace,
Slipped down to nearer view her lovely face;
Till, weakening 'neath the "Day's" unconscious lures,
He, yielding, stooped, and pressed his lips to hers!

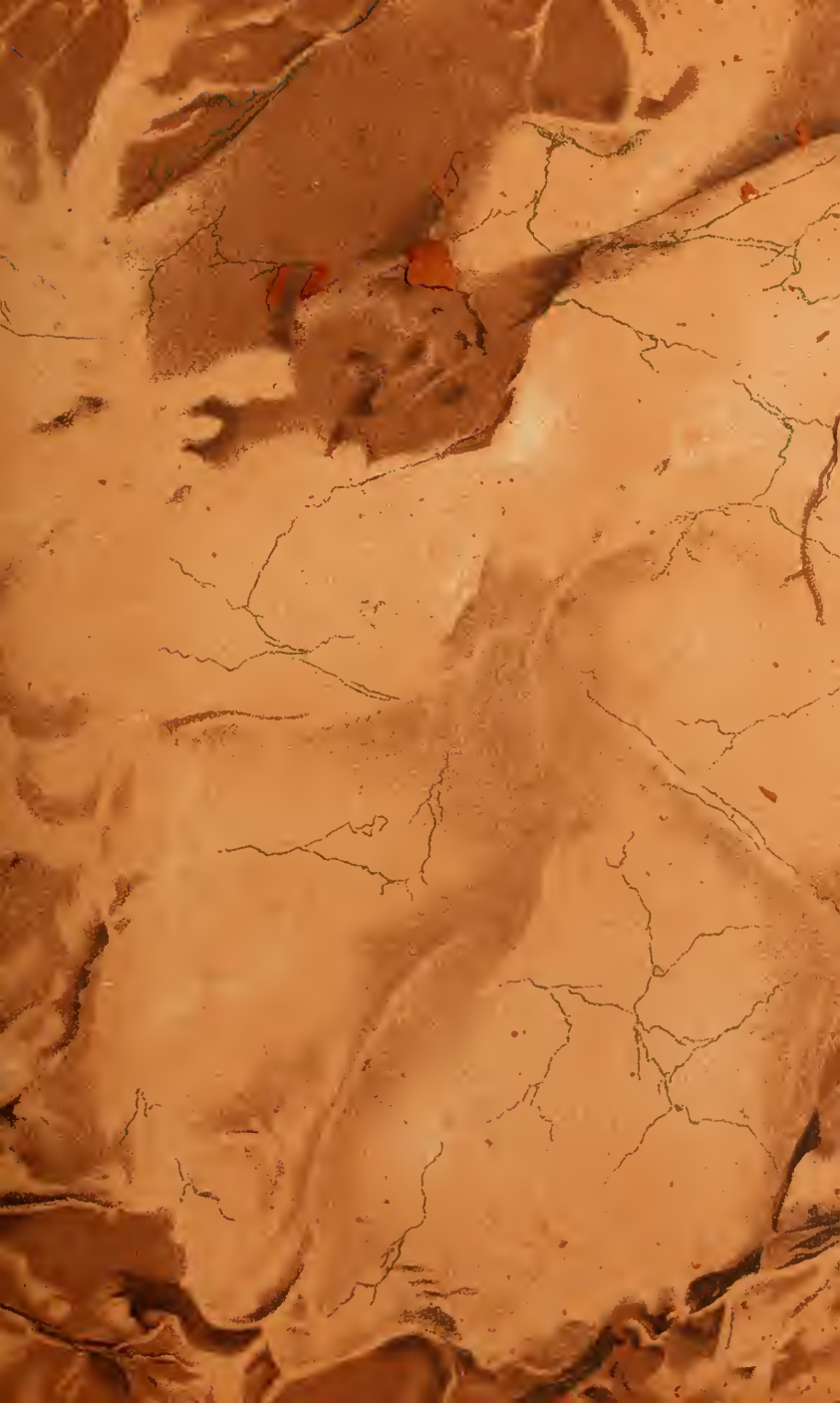
Harpstring and Bowstring

Oh! magic kiss! a hush crept o'er the earth,
The noisy winds fast ceased their boisterous mirth;
The sea grew still, the stars in quick surprise,
And modest shyness closed their timid eyes!
Thus startled from her sleep, the "Day" awoke,
While deepest blushes on her features broke;
As she saw there, the "Night" before her stand,
Smiling expectantly, with outstretched hand;
With heightened vivid color she drew near,
Her eyes shone bravely trustful, without fear;
And on her face a look of love was drawn,
Her radiance grew apace, and lo! the Dawn!

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